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ABSTRACT

Data from the 1990 Census and recent Current Population Survey reports are used to describe population change among Asian-Americans. Comparisons are made between Asian-Americans and the general non-Asian population and among Asian-Americans, focusing on four subgroups: Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans. Specific features examined in comparing Asian-American groups include: (1) immigration history; (2) demographic characteristics; and (3) explanations of adjustment to U.S. culture. Implications of the growth of Asian-American communities for future racial and ethnic relations in the United States are explored, for example, the relationship between Asian immigrants in the inner cities and inner city residents of longer standing. Six tables are attached. (Contains 20 references.) (Author/LBG)

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RECENT POPULATION GROWTH AND CHANGE AMONG ASIAN-AMERICANS

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Data from the 1990 Census and CPS are used to describe population change among Asian-Americans. Comparisons are made between Asian-Americans and the general non-Asian population and among Asian-Americans, focusing on four subgroups: Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans. Specific features examined in comparing Asian-American groups include: 1) immigration history; 2) demographic characteristics; 3) explanations of adjustment to American culture. Implications of the growth of Asian-American communities for future race/ethnic relations in the U.S. are explored, for example, the relationship between Asian immigrants in the inner cities and inner city residents of longer standing.

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The Asian population in the United States rose from 1.4 million in 1970 to 3.5 million in 1980, a phenomenal increase of 141 percent. In 1988, demographers Bouvier and Agresta predicted that the Asian population would increase to 6,533,608 by 1990 and to 9,850,364 by 2000, making up four percent of the projected U.S. population of 268 million. Now that the 1990 census count has been completed, the first of these projections can be validated[1]. In fact, the total Asian/Pacific Islander (API) population has increased to 7,273,662, an increase of 108 percent between 1980 and 1990, with an overall increase of over 400 percent from 1970 to 1990 (Table 1). Asian-Americans, for two decades the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the U.S., now comprise 2.9 percent of the U.S. population.

Much of this growth was due to immigration. In particular, the Immigration Act of 1965 increased the number of Asians eligible to enter the United States. According to Wong (1986),

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[1]Publication of the Census Bureau report Characteristics of the Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States is scheduled for 1993. In addition, the Census Bureau will release subject summary tape files (STFs) at approximately the same time. Public-use microdata sample (PUMS) files may become available in late 1992. Consequently, reliable demographic and socioeconomic data on API populations are quite scarce. As a result, this report is based on only two sources utilizing 1990 Census information (Harrison and Rolark, 1991; Woodward and Wong, 1990), and on the recent Current Population Survey (CPS) reports (which included 4,316 APIs).

In the pre-1965 period, Asian immigration accounted for only about 8 percent of the total immigrant population, about 22,000 immigrants per year. From 1965 to 1981, Asian immigration increased almost tenfold; there was a substantial increase from each Asian country except Japan. In the most recent period, about 235,000 Asian immigrants, about 43 percent of the total immigrant population, entered the United States each year.

In addition, following the fall of Saigon in April 1975, refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos added to this increase.

The Asian population includes a number of diverse groups who differ in language, culture and recency of immigration. Twenty-eight Asian groups were reported in the 1980 Census. The largest Asian groups were Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese, each comprising more than one-fifth of the Asian population. Koreans constituted approximately 10 percent. The 1990 Census counted 17 specific Asian groups and eight specific Pacific Islander groups. Chinese now comprise 22.6% of the total API population, Filipinos 19.3%, Japanese 11.7%, and Koreans 11%, so that these four groups account for 64.6% of this population (Table 1). Indochinese represent a fast-growing proportion of the remainder of this population.

Immigration History

Growth of the Asian-American population is intimately linked to the history of immigration policy for Asians. According to Gardner, Robey, and Smith (1985), this policy has moved in sudden starts and stops in tandem with changes in social attitudes,

economic conditions, and occasional international episodes such as the war in Vietnam. The first sizeable group of Asian immigrants were Chinese recruited to work in California in 1849, beginning an influx which culminated in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 by Congress, which essentially banned immigration of Chinese into the U.S. One result was substitution of Japanese workers for Chinese, contributing to a population increase for this group. The number of Koreans in the population remained small until the 1960s (the Korean government had ended emigration in 1905). Until 1934, Filipinos were allowed to move freely into the country as U.S. nationals, and slightly outnumbered Chinese by 1930.

Strict immigration laws of the 1920s virtually halted Asian immigration into the U.S. (The 1924 National Origins Act set the quota for Asians at virtually zero; by 1943 it was up to only 105 for Chinese.) During the Depression decade of the 1930s, there was little immigration from all sources, including Asia. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952[2] resulted in increased growth by 1960. When immigration policy was liberalized in 1965, Asian immigration skyrocketed. The 1965 law, which took effect in 1968, abolished

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[2]The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 codified immigration laws under a single statute. It established three principles for immigration policy: 1) the reunification of families; 2) the protection of the domestic labor force; and 3) the immigration of persons with needed skills. However, it retained the concept of the national origins system, as well as unrestricted immigration from the Western Hemisphere. APIs were still discriminated against, for prospective immigrants whose ancestry was one-half of any Far Eastern race were chargeable to minimal quotas for that nation, regardless of the birthplace of the immigrants.

the national origins quota system in favor of one giving preference to family members of persons already in the U.S. and workers with skills needed in the U.S. The annual quota for the Eastern hemisphere (which includes Asia) was set at 170,000, with no more than 20,000 from any one country. Also admitted (beyond this numerical limitation) are spouses, parents, and unmarried children under age 21 of U.S. citizens, and refugees[3] (Gardner et al., 1985). By 1981, most Asians counted as immigrants were not newly arrived, but were persons already in the U.S. who had come earlier either as refugees or individuals with nonimmigrant visas (tourists, businesspeople, students) who had their status adjusted to permanent resident status without leaving the country (Gardner et al., 1989).

Recent immigration has been high from the Phillipines, Korea, India, China, and Indochina, whereas Japanese are not immigrating to the U.S. in large numbers today. Between April and December 1975, the U.S. admitted the first great wave of Indochinese refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The number dropped over the next two years, but soared again in 1978 as hundreds of "boat people" fled from Vietnam, Cambodia (Kampuchea), and Laos as the U.S. agreed to accept 14,000 refugees a month to relieve desperate conditions in refugee camps. This second wave peaked in 1980; these refugees were admitted under the Refugee Act of 1980.

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[3]By 1981, some 60% of Asian immigrants admitted to the U.S. came outside the numerical limitation (52% of immigrants from Europe did; 28% from South America) (Fawcett, Arnold, and Minocha, 1984).

Since 1981 the number of Indochinese refugees admitted annually has not quite equaled quotas set under the Refugee Act.

Between 1980 and 1989 Asians and Pacific Islanders grew at a faster rate than any other minority population (O'Hare and Felt, 1991). Some 43 percent of Asians in the six major groups who were counted in the 1980 Census said they had immigrated into this country since 1970 (Gardner et al., 1985). Barring new restrictive immigration legislation, this trend is likely to continue. How do these immigrants differ from other groups and each other, and what is likely to be the impact of growing numbers of native-born Asian-Americans?

Comparison of Groups on Selected Factors

Regional Distribution

Asian-Americans are heavily concentrated, with more than two-thirds (67%) living in just five states in 1990: California, Hawaii, New York, Illinois, and New Jersey. In 1980 and 1990 more than half of Asian-Americans lived in the west (which includes Hawaii) compared to 21% of all Americans who lived in the west in 1990. Only a small percentage (15%) of Asians lived in the south, where 34% of the total population lived in 1990. These regional patterns varied among the different groups, with Koreans distributed most similarly to the total population (Gardner et al., 1985). Between 1980 and 1990 there was minimal shift in regional distribution of Asian-Americans (Table 2).

Asian-Americans are more concentrated in metropolitan areas than the population as a whole. This may be due, as Gardner et al.

(1985) suggest, to the fact that so many are recent immigrants, and immigrants traditionally flock to cities, especially those that contain a large number of people from their cultural and linguistic background. In 1990, only 6 percent of Asian-Americans lived outside of metropolitan areas, compared with 25 percent of non-Hispanic whites (O'Hare and Felt, 1991). The six metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington, Chicago, and San Diego absorbed over two million new API immigrants between 1980 and 1990, representing 55 percent of the total API growth (Bureau of the Census, 1991b).

Demographic Information

Table 3 presents selected demographic characteristics for 1980. Median age for the U.S. population as a whole was 30 in 1980 (31.3 for white Americans, 24.9 for blacks, 23.2 for Hispanics). Median age of the API population was 28.4. Median age among Asian groups ranged from a low of 26 for Koreans to a high of 33.5 for Japanese-Americans. In 1980, 59 percent of all Asian-Americans in the United States were foreign-born. This varied among subgroups, however, with 82 percent of Koreans foreign-born compared with only 28 percent of Japanese (O'Hare and Felt, 1991). At the present, none of this information is available for 1990.

Education

The educational success of Asian-Americans has received much attention. In 1980, 32.9 percent of adults age 25 and older in the API population had graduated from college, twice that of the U.S. population as a whole. The proportion graduating from college was

highest among Filipinos (Table 4). Asian-Americans also surpassed the general population in high school completion in 1980.

In 1990, 80 percent of the adult Asian-American population (age 25 and older) had finished high school, almost equal to the 81 percent for non-Hispanic whites. Asian-American educational attainment at the college level continued to surpass that of non-Hispanic whites. In 1990, 40 percent of Asian-Americans age 25 and above had at least four years of college, compared to 23% of non-Hispanic whites.

However, there is a sizeable group of Asian-Americans (20%) who achieve less than a high school degree, a figure which closely resembles the non-Hispanic white population (19%) and contrasts sharply with the public image of Asian-Americans as high educational achievers (O'Hare and Felt, 1991).

The educational success of Asian-Americans overall is raising new questions for academia, with some top universities reportedly adopting unofficial admission quotas for Asian-Americans to thwart their disproportionately high representation in undergraduate student bodies (cf., Mathews, 1985). Despite the possibility of obstacles, Asian-Americans are likely to continue their remarkable educational record, enabling them to advance in income and occupational status in the coming years (Gardner et al., 1985). However, data from the 1990 CPS indicates a lower economic return per year of education for Asian-American workers age 25 to 64 than white workers, which may reflect lingering discrimination against these workers (O'Hare and Felt, 1991).

Occupation

The 1980 census revealed that in general, Asian-American men and women had labor force participation rates higher than that of white workers (Table 5). Unemployment rates were generally below the rate for white Americans and far below the rate for blacks (11.8%). In 1990, the overall labor force participation rates of Asian-Americans and non-Hispanic whites were virtually the same (66%) (O'Hare and Felt, 1991). By 1990, unemployment figures were also about the same for Asian-Americans (3.5%) and non-Hispanic whites (4.2%).

Asians are somewhat more likely than whites to work in manufacturing and trade and in managerial and professional positions, and less likely than whites to work in blue-collar occupations, such as mining and construction. Asian-Americans are also unlikely to work in farming and fishing (O'Hare and Felt, 1991). In 1980, higher proportions of Asian-Americans, with the exception of Koreans, were managers than among the population as a whole. For Koreans, the accepted explanation has been that many have gone into commercial occupations such as greengrocer. For example, Koreans operate an estimated 900 of New York City's 1600 independent grocery stores (Bell, 1990). Young's (1989) study of Korean greengrocers in New York indicates that Koreans have increasingly gone into the retail produce business because of the strong prospects for a substantial return on a relatively small capital investment and much hard work. When asked why they went into business for themselves, 77.5% stated they saw a greater

opportunity to make money than by working for someone else. However, O'Hare and Felt (1991) dispute the popular notion that Asians are exceptionally successful small business people, citing data showing that in 1982 there were 55 Asian-owned businesses for every 1,000 Asians in the country (Manning and O'Hare, 1988), a rate substantially below the rate for whites of 76 per 1,000.

The general success of Asian-American immigrants at moving beyond low-paying occupations to better-paying high-status jobs may serve as a source of tension in relations between the API population and other groups. For example, some have suggested that this success is likely to provoke objections among black leaders, who may see the black population once again being left behind (Stengel, 1985).

Income and Poverty

In 1989 the median income of Asian-American families was $35,900, three percent higher than that of non-Hispanic white families ($35,000). In 1979, the difference was greater--almost nine percent above non-Hispanic whites (O'Hare and Felt, 1991). This contrasts sharply with other minority groups in the U.S. For example, black median family income in 1989 was $20,200; Hispanic median family income was $23,400. However, per capita income of Asian-Americans is somewhat lower than that of non-Hispanic whites, perhaps reflecting the larger family size of Asians. Moreover, the overall statistics mask important differences among Asian subgroups. In 1979, median income of full-time Asian workers varied by ethnic group (Table 6); Filipinos, Koreans, and

Vietnamese had incomes below the median for whites, while Chinese median family income was four times that of Laotians (O'Hare and Felt, 1991).

The 1980 Census also showed variation among Asian groups in the percentage living below poverty. Compared to 7% of white families living below poverty, 4.2% of Japanese, 6.2% of Filipinos, 7.4% of Asian Indians, 10.5% of Chinese, 13.1% of Koreans, and 35.1% of Vietnamese were classified as below poverty level in 1980. The high rate among Vietnamese reflects a recent influx of immigrants and refugees. The poverty rate for Asians in the late 1980s (17% in 1988 and 14% in 1989) was roughly twice that of non-Hispanic whites (8%)[4]. Because of increasing rates of poverty and rapid population growth, Asians have become an increasing share of the poverty population, growing from 1.7 percent in 1979 to 3.0 percent by 1989 (O'Hare and Felt, 1991). However, Asian-Americans do not appear to rely on state and federal assistance to any great extent, with the exception of recent Hmong immigrants (Bell, 1990). According to Gardner et al., 1985, "One cannot help but be struck by the low proportions of Asian-American households that have no income from earnings and the low proportions with any income from public assistance" (p. 35).

Although we cannot address the question of increasing economic polarization within the API population until 1990 Census data are

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[4]O'Hare and Felt (1991) think that the drop of 3 percentage points in the Asian poverty rate between 1988 and 1989 is probably a statistical aberration, with the real poverty rate probably somewhere between 14 and 17 percent.

available, the increased poverty rate suggests that this may be occurring.

"Model Minority", "Middleman Minority", or Assimilation?

For all the talk of a "model minority" and a single monolithic Asian-American minority group, Asian-Americans are not homogeneous. They differ in terms of demographic characteristics, occupations, incomes, and poverty. This is true among the different Asian-American groups and within them as well. Although the model minority label may seem enviable, it has perhaps served Asian-Americans badly by obscuring real differences among Asian-Americans and exacerbating the resentment of other minority groups (Lee, 1990).

Bonacich's (1973) classic "middleman minority" thesis argues that the conditions of immigrant status (of being a sojourner community) can persist, even after generations of local residence, through the formation of an ethnic economy. This ethnic economy counters the hostility of the host society by creating economic opportunities in family and other kin-based economic enterprises. Middleman minorities reinforce ethnic solidarity and a sojourner outlook that inspires an intense commitment to work and economic accumulation. The ethnic economy of middleman minorities may lead to sponsorship of opportunities for the next generation, particularly investment in the education of children (Hirschman and Wong, 1986). This helps to reinforce ethnic solidarity and to justify the sacrifice necessary.

However, conflict between the middleman and the host society

inevitably arises over economic matters and solidarity, for example, between middleman and clientele (Bonacich, 1973). This may help to partly explain recent tensions surrounding the Hmongs in St. Paul and Philadelphia, Chinese in Chicago, Vietnamese in Texas, or those between Korean retail merchants and their typically African-American neighbors in New York, Los Angeles, and other large inner cities of America.

In addition to this structural explanation, however, certain cultural variables need to be considered. Among traditional Asian values is an emphasis on individuals' obligation to the family. This value induces guilt on the part of children who do not perform well in school or on parents who do not provide well for their children. This tends to motivate the API population toward greater efforts for success in school or work (Butterfield, 1990).

Other cultural values further enhance API business opportunities. For example, when recently arrived Chinese and Koreans face difficulty in obtaining bank loans for starting businesses, traditional means of pulling together financial resources may be utilized. Many Korean merchants belong to "Kye Clubs," informal financing institutions unique to the Korean community. The clubs pool money from up to twenty or thirty close friends or relatives, with each member claiming the pot each month. No written records are ever kept (Alden, 1991).

These family values and community institutions may appear strange to non-Asians, and may serve as sources for misunderstandings. For example, rumors persist that Asians,

especially Koreans, receive special favors from the Small Business Administration or other governmental agencies.

The recency of Asian immigration also means there are linguistic barriers to intergroup communication. A recent informal survey indicates that most of the tensions between Korean merchants and their neighbors occur when the merchants are first generation immigrants. Younger immigrants with greater fluency in English get along much better with non-Asian customers.

Overall, the rapid growth of the API population, coupled with the growth of the Hispanic community, means that America, which has been essentially bi-racial, is now entering a more truly multiracial/multicultural era. We are in the midst of quite challenging times between unprecedented problems and promises.

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Table 1

Asian Population of the U.S.: 1970[1], 1980[2], 1990[3], and 2000[4]

Number, in thousands
(percent of total U.S. pop.)

	1970	1980	1990	%80->90	2000
Total U.S. Population	203,210 (100)	226,546 (100)	248,710 (100)	9.8	
White	178,119 (87.7)	188,372 (83.2)	199,686 (80.3)	6.0	
Black	22,580 (11.1)	26,495 (11.7)	29,986 (12.1)	13.2	
Total As/PI Population	1,426 (0.7)	3,500 (1.5)	7,274 (2.9)	107.8	9,850
Chinese	432	812	1,645	104.1	1,684
Filipino	337	781	1,407	81.6	2,071
Japanese	588	716	848	20.9	857
Asian Indian	NA	387	815	125.6	1,006
Korean	70	357	799	125.3	1,321
Vietnamese	NA	245	615	134.8	1,574
Other	NA	651	1,145		1,338

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[1]Note: the 1970 data on the Korean population excluded Alaska.

[2]U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population, PC80-S1-12, Asian and Pacific Islander Population by State, 1983.

[3]Harrison, R. and Rolark, S. United States Department of Commerce News: Census Bureau Releases 1990 Census Counts on Specific Racial Groups. CB91-215. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, June 12, 1991.

[4]Projected for the year 2000, from Leon F. Bouvier and Anthony Agresta, "Projections of the Asian American Population, 1980-2000," in James T. Fawcett and Benjamin Carino (Eds.), Asian and Pacific Immigration to the United States (forthcoming). Presented in The Journal of State Government, March/April 1988, pp. 71-76 (The Council of State Governments).

Table 2

Regional Distribution of Population in Thousands, 1980[1] and 1990[2] (Percent Distribution)

	Region											
	Northeast			No. Central (Midwest)			South			West		
	1980	1990	%chng	1980	1990	%chng	1980	1990	%chng	1980	1990	%chng
tot. U.S population	49,135 (21.7)	50,809 (20.4)	3.4	58,866 (26.0)	59,669 (24.0)	1.4	75,372 (33.3)	85,446 (34.4)	13.4	43,172 (19.1)	52,786 (21.2)	22.3
tot. As/PI population	560 (16.0)	1,335 (18.4)	138.6	390 (11.1)	768 (10.6)	96.9	470 (13.4)	1,122 (15.4)	138.9	2,081 (59.5)	4,048 (55.7)[3]	94.5
Chinese	218 (26.8)	445 (27.1)	104.1	75 (9.2)	133 (8.1)	77.3	91 (11.2)	204 (12.4)	124.2	428 (52.7)	863 (52.5)	101.6
Filipino	77 (9.9)	143 (10.2)	85.7	81 (10.4)	113 (8.0)	39.5	85 (11.0)	159 (11.3)	87.1	538 (68.8)	991 (70.4)	84.2
Japanese	47 (6.5)	74 (8.7)	57.4	46 (6.5)	63 (7.4)	37.0	48 (6.6)	67 (7.9)	39.6	575 (80.3)	643 (75.8)	11.8
Korean	68 (19.1)	182 (22.8)	167.6	65 (18.1)	109 (13.6)	67.7	71 19.9	153 (19.2)	115.5	153 (42.9)	355 (44.4)	132.0

[1]Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Asian and Pacific Islander Population by State: 1980. PC80-S1-12.

[2]Source: Harrison, R. and Rolark, S. United States Department of Commerce News: Census Bureau Releases 1990 Census Counts on Specific Racial Groups. CB91-215. June, 1991.

[3]O'Hare and Felt (1991) report that 58% of Asian-Americans lived in the west in 1990.

Table 3

Selected Characteristics for Asian Groups: 1980[1]

	% 18+	% 65+	median age	males per 100 females
Total U.S.	71.8	11.3	30.0	94.5
Total As/PI	69.8	5.9	28.4	93.5
Chinese	74.1	6.9	29.8	102.4
Filipino	67.9	7.2	28.4	93.2
Japanese	79.1	7.3	33.5	84.8
Korean	63.2	2.4	25.9	72.3

[1]Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. We, the Asian and Pacific Island Americans.

Table 4

Educational Attainment of Persons 25 Years Old and Over: 1980[1] and 1990[2]

	Total U.S.	Total A/PI	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean
% hs grad						
1980	66.5	74.8	71.3	74.2	81.6	78.1
1990	81.0	80.0				
% 4+ yrs coll						
1980	16.2	32.9	36.6	37.0	26.4	33.7
1990	23.0	40.0				

[1]Source: "We, the Asian and Pacific Islander Americans."

[2]O'Hare and Felt, 1991.

Table 5

Labor Force Status of Persons 16 and Older, 1980[1]

	Total U.S.	Total As/PI	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean
% in labor force	62.0	66.6	66.4	72.5	67.8	63.9
% unemployed	6.5	5.2	4.1	4.6	3.3	6.9
Class of worker						
private wage/salary	75.6	76.2	75.9	79.1	70.8	76.2
federal gov't	3.9	5.0	4.4	7.0	5.3	3.1
state gov't	4.6	6.4	6.3	4.5	9.0	3.9
local gov't	8.7	5.7	5.1	6.5	6.4	3.3
self-employed	6.8	6.1	7.2	2.7	7.9	11.9
unpd. fam. worker	.5	.7	1.0	.2	.6	1.6

[1]Source: "We, the Asian and Pacific Islander Americans."

Table 5 (cont'd)

	Total U.S.	Total As/PI	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean
Occ. Category						
mgr/prof. spec.	22.7	28.8	32.6	25.1	28.5	24.9
tech. sales/ admin.suppt.	30.3	30.8	30.1	33.3	34.2	27.4
service	12.9	15.6	18.6	16.5	12.8	16.5
craft	12.9	8.4	5.6	8.3	10.0	9.9
operator	18.3	14.2	12.7	14.0	10.1	20.4
farm	2.9	2.1	.5	2.8	4.4	9.0

Table 6

Median Family Income of Asian-Americans, 1980[1] and 1989[2]; Percent Below Poverty, 1979

	Total U.S. population	Total As/PI population	Chinese	Filipino	Japanese	Korean
1980 median family income	$19,917	$22,713	$22,559	$23,687	$27,354	$20,459
1989 median family income	$35,000[3]	$35,900				
% of families in poverty, 1979	9.6	10.7	10.5	6.2	4.2	13.1

[1]Source: "We, the Asian and Pacific Islander Americans."

[2]O'Hare and Felt, 1991

[3]income of non-Hispanic whites

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